



Virginia Department of Health Antibiotic Resistance Fact Sheet

What is antibiotic resistance?

Antibiotics kill bacteria. Antibiotic resistance means the medicines used to treat bacterial infections no longer work or can take longer to work. Resistant bacteria can cause serious illness and can be spread from one person to another.

What causes antibiotic resistance?

Antibiotics are often taken when they are not needed. Antibiotic resistance is caused by the misuse and overuse of antibiotics.

Why should we be concerned about antibiotic resistance?

Antibiotic resistance is a growing problem. Almost all common bacterial infections in the U.S. and worldwide are becoming resistant to antibiotics. When bacteria become resistant they are harder to treat and will continue to grow.

When should antibiotics be used?

Antibiotics do not cure viral infections. Viruses cause most common illnesses, such as bronchitis, coughs, colds, runny noses and sore throats. Most viral infections will get better in 7-10 days. Taking an antibiotic for a viral infection will not stop the spread of illness, make you feel better sooner or stop the spread of the illness to others.

Antibiotics are only helpful when used to treat a bacterial infection and when taken exactly as prescribed. Always seek the advice of your health provider before taking antibiotics.

How can I prevent antibiotic resistance?

- Don't ask for antibiotics if you have a viral infection like a cold or the flu.
- Take the antibiotic exactly as the doctor tells you.
- Take all of the medication, even if you feel better.
- Do not save some of your antibiotic for the next time you are sick.
- Do not take an antibiotic that is prescribed for someone else.
- Talk with your doctor about antibiotic resistance and ask what else you can do to feel better sooner.

What else can I do to prevent illness?

- Wash your hands often and teach your children to do the same.
- Keep your family's shots up to date and consider an annual flu shot.